

Emperor Arthur

The Portrayal of King Arthur in The Dream of Rhonabwy

Prepared For:

Medieval Prose in Wales (HPCS6019)

University of Wales, Trinity Saint David

By

Zane Newitt

Student No. 1604554

December 16th, 2025

The Welsh Medieval Arthurian Tradition

King Arthur is featured or referenced in several manuscripts including poetry (in both epic and praise genres), elegies, kings lists, ecclesiastical charters, genealogies and prose, the sum of which form a rich Medieval Arthurian literary tradition in Wales. The tradition had staying power, spanning more than seven hundred years and was the catalyst for what is now fifteen hundred years of a worldwide phenomenon of literature, media and scholarship that celebrates The Once and Future King.

The earliest known mention of Arthur is in *The Book of Aneirin*, which contains *Y Gododdin*, an Old Welsh poem alluding to Arthur's fame as a warrior. Although the extant copy is from the 13th century, it was transmitted from the late sixth or early seventh and is a primary source contemporary with the events it describes. If *Y Gododdin* is a bookend demarking the beginning of the *Welsh Arthuriad*, then the 14th century *Dream of Rhonabwy*, in which the Arthur is portrayed as a supremely powerful international Emperor, is the enigmatic delineation of its ending. Between the extremities of 'soldier and emperor,' Arthur's origins, characteristics, reign, passing and legacy develop through the lens of surviving works which include; the *Historia Brittonum* (9th century), the *Annales Cambriae* (10th century), *The Spoils of Annwn* (10th century), various hagiographies referred to as *Lives* of British Saints, which start to appear in the 11th century and *Pa Gur* and *Culhwch and Olwen* and Geoffrey of Monmouth's sentinel work, *Historia Regum Britanniae* (HRB) highlight the 1100's. The following century produced *The Welsh Triads* and *Stanzas of the Graves* leading up to the late and probable final entry, *The Dream of Rhonabwy*, a short prose included by Lady Charlotte Guest in the Mabinogion.

Although written (or transcribed) by diverse authors over several centuries, the disparate sources coalesce into a compendium that constitutes the foundation of Arthurian Scholarship. The cross-references, touchpoints, triangulation, and assumptive requirements contained in the Welsh material demands that there was once a vast body of prose and oral tradition and that a contemporary reader or hearer was deeply familiar with the subject. In this regard, what is 'not mentioned or described' is of equal scholarly interest.

Additionally, approaching Arthurian Medieval prose is strikingly similar to Biblical Studies in general and Textual Criticism in particular. The Texts that can be studied and handled today are 'copies of copies' that have suffered, or benefited from, edits atop edits. They have been molded by the change of language, mood, culture and current events, often driven backwards into the content by scribes and copyists. Indeed, a serious study of Medieval Arthurian Literature parallels a study of Scripture in that the material must be revisited anew as the fullness of it can be studied for an entire lifetime without fully 'arriving' at a dogmatic conclusion. The content is at once both fluid yet stable, consistent yet contradictory, easy to apprehend yet impossible to comprehend, and, like the Bible, it fuels hot debates that sells lots of books and embroils hot debates that end not a few friendships. With these precepts in mind, this essay provides analysis of Arthur's portrayal, via both what is included and absent in the tale,

and with a ready mindfulness about the political events occurring at the time of the writing of Arthur's corpus's final entry, the Dream of Rhonabwy.

About the Dream of Rhonabwy

Breuddwyd Rhonabwy ("Rhonabwy's Dream") is an oneiric time travel tale set, paradoxically, both in a dismal and decrepit 12th century Powys and in the gilded and glorious renowned kingdom of Arthur and his companions six hundred years afore. Dr. Sam Lasman, a Medievalist contributing to the March of 2023 edition of *Arthuriana*, *The Journal of Arthurian Studies*, writes of the struggles of dating the story, and suggests a two hundred year or more range for its probable compilation:

Critics have placed the Breuddwyd's composition anywhere from the immediate vicinity of its mid-twelfth century frametale, to shortly before the compilation of the Llyfr Coch two and a half centuries later.¹

A fixed triangulation point for dating *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* is that it references King Madog ap Maredudd in the past tense, and places its main character, epithetless Rhonabwy along with two companions, as retainers directed by Madog to locate his rebellious brother, Iorwerth. The manuscript can thus be no sooner than the 1160s but lacks external evidence to fix the late range of when it may have been written or copied. The *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* has but one primary source copy, an inclusion in the *Llyfr Coch Hergest* (The Red Book of Hergest, c 1382 to 1425²). It publishes as an inclusion in the Mabinogion and viewed by some scholars as its final entry (by a high margin). Will Parker, who is the author of *Four Branches of Mabinogi* and organized a referenceable academic project website, *Mabinogion.info* summarizes this view:

There has even been a suggestion that it was written as late as the 1380s, which would account for its absence from the White Book of Rhydderch. Whatever the exact dating, there is a powerful sense that in the *Dream of Rhonabwy* we have a late medieval reader casting a backward glance into the literary culture that produced the Three Romances, the *Dream of Macsen* and *Culhwch ac Olwen*. The Age of the Llywelyns is over, and the thought-world that produced the Mabinogion no longer fits with contemporary realities.³

¹ Dr. Sam Lasman, *Dreaming The Past's Futures: Rhonabwy's Dream As Chronofiction*, *Arthuriana: The Journal of Arthurian Studies* 33., (2023), pg. 2

² Ibid, pg. 2

³ Will Parker, *The Mabinogion* (2010) < <https://www.mabinogion.info/rhonabwy.htm> > [accessed, 19 December, 2025]

This is an important consideration when analyzing *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*'s portrayal of Arthur as the author (s) or copyists had the unique benefit of reflecting upon several hundred years of tradition. A contributor 'in the Mabinogion looking backwards on the era that gave the world the Mabinogion' makes for an enigmatic inclusion of the text and making the short story peculiar, giving way to theories of satire or political sarcasm that will be explored throughout and may have bearing on its portrayals of King Arthur.

Enter the Haughty King

Breuddwyd Rhonabwy Portrays Arthur as of Generationally Superior Constitution

Dr. Lasman describes 12th century Powys as '*The Dung Ages*'⁴. The description may not be overreaching when considering the conditions described in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, which opens by describing the strife within the kingdom. King Maradog, the ruler of Powys, is at odds with his jealous brother, Iorwerth, who has refused a post as Maradog's warband chief and instead has engaged in rogue raids in Lloegr. The King dispatches troops to locate him. One group of retainers, consisting of Cynwrig Frychgoch, Cadwgan Fras and Rhonabwy join the quest and, reaching the English border and needing lodging, find respite within the house of Heilyn Goch son of of Cadwgan son of Iddon. Lasman comments on the conditions, '*This proves to be a barely habitable wreck, full of smoke, cattle dung, and fleas*'⁵ Sioned Davies's translation of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* goes further than the commentary, using overtly repulsive adjectives to give the reader the frame and setting of Rhonabwy's forthcoming vision:

And when they approached the house, they could see a very black old building with a straight gable end, and plenty of smoke coming from it. When they came inside they could see an uneven floor, full of holes; where there was a bump in the floor, scarcely could a man stand up, so slippery was the floor with the dung of cattle and their piss. Where there was a hole, a man would go over his ankle, what with mixture of water and cattle-piss. And there were branches in abundance on the floor, with their tips eaten by cattle. When they came to the upper end of the hall they could see bare, dusty, dais boards, and a hag feeding a fire on one dais. And when she became cold she would throw a lapful of chaff on the fire so that it was not easy for anyone in the world to put up with that smoke entering his nostrils...⁶

The setting at Heilyn Coch, a datable historic location, might help fix the timing of the manuscript as late as the 1380's⁷. If accurate, this has relevance to its portrayal of Arthur in that

⁴ Dr. Sam Lasman, *Dreaming The Past's Futures: Rhonabwy's Dream As Chronofiction*, *Arthuriana: The Journal of Arthurian Studies* 33., (2023), pg. 5

⁵ Ibid, pg. 5

⁶ Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion*, Kindle Edition. (Oxford, New York: Oxford World's Classics, 2007), pg. 343

⁷ Will Parker, *The Mabinogion* (2010) < <https://www.mabinogion.info/rhonabwy.htm> > [accessed, 19 December, 2025]

it means the Age of the Llewelyns has long passed, Wales is in dire times, under the thumb of the Normans, and is in seemingly endless internal strife. The times are dark, and the opening imagery for the questing soldiers is filled with toxic air, filth and squaller, creating a visual extreme for the reader about how awful current Wales is, with a forthcoming contrast of the grandeur of Wales past.

Rhonabwy, unable to sleep admits the fleas and rancor, takes his rest upon an enchanted yellow ox skin and '*As soon as sleep entered his eyes he was granted a vision, that he and his companions were travelling across Maes Argyngroeg*'⁸ The troop are transported, in a dream sequence, back to Powys and immediately meet their guide, the infamous Iddog, the embroiler of the strife at Camlan, and one of the principle actors who brought about the fall of the kingdom. The modern soldiers are represented as cowardly, fleeing from the might of a sixth century Briton. Asking for, and receiving, mercy, the author then gives a detailed description of Iddog's person and horse and sets the time of the dream sequence; after Camlan. Iddog, being young and blood lusting, had stirred the civil war being Arthur and Modred by embellishing or simply baring false witness of messages sent between the two leaders. A treacherous sin, but now Iddog is in a penitent state, being seven years reconciled to King Arthur. This remarkable nugget validates that the King is alive and well after Camlan, and could be deduced as *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy's* first subtle contribution to its portrayal of the King.

The troop meet one more rider, 'Rhuawn Bebyr son of Deorthach Wledig,' and again an ornate description is given:

When they looked towards the commotion, behold, a young lad with yellowish-red hair, without a beard or a moustache, and the look of a nobleman about him, on a large horse. From the top of its shoulders and its kneecaps downwards, the horse was yellow. The man was wearing a garment of red brocaded silk, embroidered with yellow silk, and the fringes of the mantle were yellow. What was yellow of his and his horse's garment was as yellow as the flowers of the broom, and what was red was as red as the reddest blood in the world.⁹

This pattern is repeated throughout the tale, with a loud, notable exception:

Then they travelled across the great plain of Argyngroeg to Rhydy-groes on the Hafren. And a mile from the ford, on each side of the road, they could see huts and tents and the mustering of a great host. They came to the edge of the ford, and saw Arthur sitting on a flat meadow below the ford, with Bedwin the Bishop on one side and Gwartheygydd son of Caw* on the other.¹⁰

⁸ Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion*, Kindle Edition. (Oxford, New York: Oxford World's Classics, 2007), pg. 343

⁹ Ibid, pg. 343

¹⁰ Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion*, Kindle Edition. (Oxford, New York: Oxford World's Classics, 2007), pg. 347

King Arthur personal appearance is void of description, and the text implies that Rhonabwy recognizes him, indicating that Arthur's fame precedes him, his features so well known, that a depiction is not required for the Dreamer, nor for the readers. A short exchange ensues between Arthur and Iddog, where Arthur asks, '*Iddog, where did you find these little men?*'¹¹ The implication is that Arthur (and his hosts) stature is great while the men of the future are small, fearful and puny. Following this, Arthur, overwrought that his generation is sacrificing so much for a future generation so unworthy, furls in disdain, declaring:

‘Iddog,’ said Arthur, ‘I am not laughing; but rather I
feel so sad that scum such as these are protecting
this Island after such fine men that protected it in the past.’¹²

This entry in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* is an oft cited proof text that author intends satire. Lasman's essay asserts '*The Breuddwyd is often called a parody or satire on traditional Arthurian seemingly because it is hard to tell what else it could possibly be.*'¹³ The language is even stronger in the translation given by Dr. Lasman, '*I am not laughing, but rather I feel miserable, that men as shitty as this guard this Isle, after such men as guarded it before.*'¹⁴ The overt reference to dung carries a potential, and brilliant double meaning as it literally describes the physical reality of the Troop's filth-caked condition while strongly hinting at a dig against the generational weakness of the Dreamer's generation. Rhonabwy and his fellows are covered in cow dung, meanwhile the author spends whole paragraphs on the bright and gilded grandeur of Arthur's hosts, and the first mention of the Grek King is that of a haughty, aloof ruler looking down on both Rhonabwy and Arthur's progeny down the corridor of time.

The Lord of the Ring

Breuddwyd Rhonabwy's Portrait of Physical Descriptions, Weaponry and Magical Ring

Although Arthur is not physically described, the final installment of the Mabinogion provides, potentially, an early description of his famous blade, Caledfwlch (Excalibur) more than a hundred years before Sir Thomas Malory.

Behold, he got up with Arthur's sword in his hand and the image of two golden serpents on the sword. When the sword was drawn from the sheath, it was like

¹¹ Ibid. pg. 347

¹² Ibid. pg. 347

¹³ Dr. Sam Lasman, *Dreaming The Past's Futures: Rhonabwy's Dream As Chronofiction*, *Arthuriana: The Journal of Arthurian Studies* 33., (2023), pg. 3

¹⁴ Ibid, pg. 9

seeing two flames of fire from the serpents' jaws. And it was not easy for anyone to look at that, because it was so terrifying.¹⁵

Perhaps drawing on the list of Arthur's possessions found in a much earlier tale in the Mabinogion itself, *Culhwch and Olwen*, comprised as early as 1100 C.E cites Caledfwlch by name whilst *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* provides the reader with description of its design, and Ark of the Covenant style supernatural properties. In addition to the Sword of Power, *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy's* Arthur also wears a magical ring:

Then Iddog said, 'Rhonabwy, do you see the ring with the stone in it on the emperor's hand?' 'I do,' he said. 'One of the virtues of the stone is that you will remember what you have seen here tonight; and had you not seen the stone, you would remember nothing about this.'¹⁶

This one-sided exchange, which contains not expounding by Iddog or even an inquiry by Rhonabwy carries gleanings that are important to the Tale. Although Iddog has described the heraldry and fashion of knights, the brightness of their sigils and intricate details about their persons and belongings, and guided Rhonabwy to look over plains and fields, he uses the word 'tonight' validating that Rhonabwy, although seeing things only seeable in daylight, is within a nighttime vision. Secondly, Iddog connects Arthur directly to his slight visitor from the future, possessing an occultic ring with powers seemingly aimed 'at Rhonabwy'. Dr. Lawson's *Arthuriana* journal entry asserts:

So Iddog knows that Rhonabwy is dreaming; but he also makes clear the importance of remembering the dream beyond its confines. Even more peculiarly, the rhinwedd ("virtue" or "occult power") of the stone in Arthur's ring seems intended for Rhonabwy only—it is hard to see how any of the emperor's court could benefit from such an ability. Marginal as he is to the action, disdained by Arthur and the heroes of the past, Rhonabwy is nonetheless the only figure for whom the magic of the emperor's ring could function.

A King Arthur possessing, and wielding, magical items is consistent with the body of literature that developed prior to *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*. *Culhwch and Olwen* give him a

¹⁵ Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion*, Kindle Edition. (Oxford, New York: Oxford World's Classics, 2007), pg. 351

¹⁶ Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion*, Kindle Edition. (Oxford, New York: Oxford World's Classics, 2007), pg. 347-348

magical dagger, an enchanted cauldron and a mantle that renders its wearer invisible (the same mantle, called *Gwenn*, appears in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*) forming a continuity on this topic. However, a haughty King Arthur insulting his own legacy and perhaps Rhonabwy's comprehension ability (that he would need the aide of magic or otherwise forget the vision) does lean towards a sense of using Arthur as a literary vehicle for upbraiding or mocking 12th century Medieval Wales.

Arthur of Cornwall, or All of Britain? Where Arthur Is From According to *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*

Breuddwyd Rhonabwy (The Dream of Rhonabwy) alludes to a Cornish Arthur on the merit of the following statement in the text, offered by his Steward, *Then Cai got up and said, 'Whoever wishes to follow Arthur, let him be with him tonight in Cornwall. * And he who does not, let him stand against Arthur until the end of the truce.'*¹⁷ This occurrence follows preparations for an apparent pausing of the armies preparation to engage the Saxons at Mount Badon. However, the manuscript does not explicitly state where Arthur was born, or where he is from. As with many attributes of Arthur in the tale, deduction is required by what *isn't stated*. The writer goes through great pains to share of princes and warriors, with detailed color schemes, heraldry, and often direct place of origin, from both Britain and abroad:

Then Rhonabwy could see a troop, and each man wearing a pure black garment with pure white fringes, and from the tops of the horses' forelegs and their kneecaps downwards, they were pure white. And their banners were pure black, and the tip of each one was pure white. 'Iddog,' said Rhonabwy, 'who is that pure black troop over there?' 'The men of Denmark, led by Edern son of Nudd.'¹⁸

The writer directly states that Arthur's Earl, Cadwr, is from Cornwall, then surrounds the King with warriors from Rheged in the north, Mark from Norway, Caradog Freichfras from Gwent and the sons of Caw from Gwnyedd. The first setting of the vision occurs in Powys, along the River Severn, a very central location that serves all of Wales. The writer seems intentional about not over emphasizing Arthur's home or base and instead makes him a ruler for all of Wales and Cornwall.

A final clue, however, for a Cornish Arthur is the inclusion of Arthur's Bishop, Bedwin (Bedwini). He is associated with Celliwig, which is typically placed in Cornwall. This makes Arthur's Earl, Sword Bearer and Bishop all from the southernmost horn of the Isles. Linking back to the challenge of textual criticism akin to Biblical Studies, however, the translation of

¹⁷ Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion*, Kindle Edition. (Oxford, New York: Oxford World's Classics, 2007), pg. 349

¹⁸ Ibid, pg. 350

both Celliwig and Cernyw as Cornwall is not without disputation. As early as the 12th century, Geoffrey of Monmouth and Gerald of Wales place Arthur in Caerleon in South Wales and some Arthurian Scholars, citing Celliwig in Gwent and combining that with Geoffrey and various Saint's Lives posit an Arthur of Glamorgan and Gwent. Using Davie's translation however, the portrait is of a Cornish Arthur. However, this distinction fades from importance as *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* promotes Arthur to Emperor, a supreme monarch of international standing.

Detached and Distracted

Breuddwyd Rhonabwy's Match with Owain and His Ravens

The earliest written account of Arthur, found in a single stanza in *Y Gododdin* praises a warrior called Gwawrddur for his bravery but provides a comparative caveat, '*though we was no Arthur*'.¹⁹ The praise, although very limited, provides a periscope into early connotations of Arthur as a soldier. It does not remove or imply that he was not a king or a leader, but it does demonstrate that he was on the front lines, engaged in the fight with his men.

Moving through the available Welsh Medieval texts this concept continues and is strengthened by Nennius. *The twelfth battle was on Mount Badon in which there fell in one day 960 men from one rally of Arthur's; and no one brought them low except he.*²⁰ The early Arthur is directly engaged in battle and provides an extreme example to his men of *leading by example*.

Outside the field of battle, Arthur also leads where slaying monsters and hags are concerned and is at the vanguard of leading a hunt. The poem *Pa Gur* includes these elements as Arthur; combats a witch in the hall of Afarnach, versus Pen Palach, in the dwellings of Disethach and against supernatural devil-dogs in the mount of Edinburgh.²¹

By stark contrast, the late Dream of Rhonabwy portrays a ruler of unspeakable power who speaks little and engages even less. This Arthur is not the folk hero of earlier works, rather a king upon a hilltop (figuratively) guiding his subjects as pawns below.

Following the vision's sequence following Camlan, the story goes further back in time (making for complex chronological outworking of the text) to equally famous Battle of Mount Badon. Arthur is depicted as so disconnected from a battle that is so famous that it slowed the encroachment of the Saxons for a generation and temporarily staved off the Dark Ages that the king must be insulted in order to be reminded of the war coming to his shore.

'You needed advice. What madness made you ride so foolishly, causing the water to splash from the ford over Arthur and the consecrated bishop and their counsellors, so that they were as wet as if they had been dragged out of the river?' 'Then I shall take it as advice.' And he turned his horse's head back towards his troop. 'Iddog,' said Rhonabwy, 'who was the rider just now?' 'A young man

¹⁹Jon B Coe and Simon Yount, *The Celtic Sources For The Arthurian Legend* (Felinfach: Llanerch Publishers, 1995), pg. 152

²⁰Jon B Coe and Simon Yount, *The Celtic Sources For The Arthurian Legend* (Felinfach: Llanerch Publishers, 1995), pg. 127

²¹ Celtic Sources

considered to be the wisest and most accomplished in this kingdom, Addaon son of Taliesin.’ ‘Who was the man who struck his horse?’ ‘A stubborn and fierce lad, Elphin son of Gwyddno.’* Then a proud, handsome man with eloquent, bold speech said that it was strange that a host as large as that could be accommodated in such a confined place, and that it was even stranger that those who had promised to be at the battle of Baddon by noon, to fight Osla Gyllellfawr,* should still be there: ‘Decide whether you will go or not. I shall go.’ ‘You are right,’ said Arthur. ‘And let us go together.’²²

Detached, distracted yet receptive of advice from his subjects, the King proceeds to a pre-war gathering where a sort of confederacy of warriors from different regions in the kingdom are gathered for the forthcoming battle; chief among these in Owain ap Urien of Rheged. There are illogical groupings that distort customary chronology of Arthurian era generations in the vision (i.e. Addaon son of Taliesin is far too late to be considered a contemporary with Elphin so Gwyddno) and the pairing of Owain and Arthur is also somewhat strained and peculiar when Maelgwn, Urien or Llynfarch Oer would have made more logical sense. Nevertheless, it is Owain featured in the tale. Instead of preparing battle strategies or entering meaningful discourse about how to defeat Osla Big Knife (the Saxons), Arthur and Owain rather engage in an ancient Welsh board game, similar to chess. It is Arthur who initiates the invitation to play, ‘*Owain, said Arthur, ‘do you want to play gwyddbwyll?’ ‘I do, lord,’ said Owain. And the red-haired servant brought the gwyddbwyll to Arthur and Owain—pieces of gold and a board of silver. And they began to play.*’²³ As the game ensues, infighting occurs between Arthur’s men, presumably of the South, and Owain’s birds, who are mystical personifications of his hosts from the North. Arthur and Owain play three rounds of the game, with escalating conflict, including the loss of life of many Britons, devastating their ranks on the veritable eve of war. Arthur seems indifferent and impersonal, stoically saying ‘your move’ when beseeched by knights pleading for an end to the internal slaughter. When the infighting reaches a gory zenith, and following the third beseeching, Arthur at last instructs his men to cease from the fighting.

There is much to unravel in this, the main ‘event’ at this part of the dream sequence. The battle of Badon doesn’t happen, at least at the story’s ending, and the writer once again spends more time and text-space on the garments and insignia of the knights engaging the king than on Owain and Arthur themselves. Parker notes:

As already noted, very little actually happens in the *Dream*, but this is as close to a narrative action that we are likely to find. In terms of its content, the episode seems to invite exegesis, flaunting as it does symbolic content (the ravens, the *gwyddbwyll* figures, the heraldic devices) and symbolic

²² Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion*, Kindle Edition. (Oxford, New York: Oxford World's Classics, 2007), pgs.348-349

²³ Ibid, pgs. 351-352

actions (the raising and lowering of the standard, the playing of *gwyddbwyll* and the crushing of the figures) within a ritualized, choreographed sequence.

The author, or satirist, seems to be using Arthur as a dualistic counterpart to Owain, and to royal houses of the time. His role is seemingly cosmopolitan, an Emperor with relatives in Denmark and subjects in Greece and Norway.²⁴ Angela Carson, a scholar contributing to Mabinogion.info puts forth such a theory:

..which would equate Owain and his men with the nativist or nationalistic element within the Welsh aristocracy, and the men of Arthur with the internationalist element. The appearance of Llywelyn Fawr's golden leopard on the helm of Arthur's envoy may at first seem surprising (although as we have seen elsewhere, the wily son Iorwerth had been quite capable of assuming an internationalist position when it was in his interests to do so). But the quadruple leopard ensign would be adopted by the English Princes of Wales in the fourteenth century, and would thus become a symbol of English power (just as the famous 'three lions' had been since the reign of Richard I). If this was indeed the resonance of the flame-tongued leopard in the *Dream*, then Carson may be broadly correct in her geopolitical interpretation of the *gwyddbwyll* episode.²⁵

The great effort that *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy's* author goes to give what seem to be cryptic descriptions today, may have much more understandable at the time, and Owain Rheged could be Owain Gwnyedd, written backwards into the text, making King Arthur and archetype of King John of England from the same era.

Mysterious Portrayals to End the Era

The Arthur of The Dream of Rhonabwy is a supreme emperor, quite developed and promoted from his origin as a Dux Bellorum or battle-lord, a chieftain and an involved, dynamic folk hero from the early material. The promotion, although potentially a celebration of the prowess of the king, seems rather to be a literary device to highlight the bleakness of Medieval Powys and the ridiculous excess of the Golden Age of Arthuriana, with nods to local rulers and dynasties along the way. Arthur is haughty, denigrating, disengaged, forgetful, unfocused, but somehow also revered during parts of the story. Selected snippets can highlight his weaponry, his inner circle and nuggets and leads of Arthurian historical investigation (i.e. Cornwall vs South Wales) while other portions of the story cast the Once and Future King in a farcical, unpleasant light. Similar to Biblical textual studies, the translations, the contemporary events and worldview of the scribes have great bearing on the intent and meaning of the story, much of which is

²⁴ Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion*, Kindle Edition. (Oxford, New York: Oxford World's Classics, 2007), pg. 350

²⁵ Will Parker, *The Mabinogion* (2010) < <https://www.mabinogion.info/rhonabwy.htm> > [accessed, 19 December 2025]

obfuscated, causing much conjecture about the portrayal of history and legend's most famous sovereign in the Welsh tradition's most mysterious entry.

Bibliography

Davies, Sioned, *The Mabinogion*, Kindle Edition. (Oxford, New York: Oxford World's Classics, 2007)

Coe, Jon B and Young, Simon, *The Celtic Sources For The Arthurian Legend* (Felinfach: Llanerch Publishers, 1995)

Lasman, Dr. Sam, *Dreaming The Past's Futures: Rhonabwy's Dream As Chronofiction*, *Arthuriana: The Journal of Arthurian Studies* 33., (2023)

Parker, Will, *The Mabinogion* (2010) < <https://www.mabinogion.info/rhonabwy.htm> > [accessed, 19 December, 2025]